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Luncheon Guest

Concern that Ronald Reagan is being badly served by some advisers desperate to reestablish U.S.-Soviet détente rose sharply with a recent invitation from the president to Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko to a cozy meal in the White House, with support from Secretary of State George Shultz, who also attended. One meal with the former Soviet diplomat could scarcely make much impact on Reagan's mindset about communist Russia. That is true even though Shevchenko portrayed Andrei Gromyko in his best-selling book, "Break With Moscow," as "ideologically soft" and a "moderating factor within the Politburo."

Shevchenko is the shadowy defector whose 1976 "spying career" for the United States as a Soviet official at the U.N. is ridiculed as "demonstrably fictitious." That is the judgment of noted author and Soviet espionage student Edward Jay Epstein, who debunked Shevchenko's book and his alleged intelligence offerings in the latest issue of The New Republic.

The worry here is not Shevchenko as such but whether Shultz and lesser diplomatic advisers, whose sincerity is not questioned, are treating the November summit with the seriousness it requires. Extending the most coveted invitation in the world to a Soviet defector whose diplomatic rank was roughly equivalent to a deputy assistant secretary in the State Department signals a lack of seriousness.

"It's worse than amateur hour," one noted Soviet ex-

pert, speaking without attribution, told us. A Republican who is in close touch with U.S.-Soviet affairs, he described the invitation as "degrading" to the White House and incapable of producing a single significant piece of information for Reagan that any middle-level U.S. specialist could not supply. Why, then, would Shultz either originate or approve the president's invitation to Shevchenko?

The answer may lie in Shultz's apparent commitment to a new U.S.-Soviet arrangement that will soften the climate of hostility. But he has yet to spell out for the president what he has in mind in the way of U.S. concessions to reach such a new arrangement. Nancy Reagan seems also to be convinced the president is capable of breaking the downward cycle in superpower relations.

But there is evidence that the president himself has taken steps to reduce large hopes. Just before the announcement of the Nov. 19 summit, he brought Shultz, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane into his office and instructed them in precise terms. He expected the full agreement of each, he said, that the only result of the first meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev would be to "set an agenda" for the future. Weinberger and McFarlane, immune to the summit narcotic, needed no such warning. But administration sources say that Reagan's caution is nowhere evident in Shultz's office.

The shift of Andrei Gromyko, Shevchenko's onetime boss, to titular head of state occurred after Reagan's intimate little party for the Soviet defector. But whatever he told or did not tell the president about his old boss as he sat at Reagan's White House table would not and could not have had the slightest relevance to the journey to be taken on Nov. 19. It was a frivolous intrusion on the most serious business confronting Reagan today.

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